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Production Of PCB Cut By Half

Monsanto Co. production of PCB, a DDT-like substance often blamed for injury to the environment, is only half what it was last year, the company said today.

In its first public disclosure of its production figures, the company, which is the sole United States manufacturer of PCB, reported 1970 production was 42,327 tons; 1971 production is expected to be 20,336 tons.

The 1970 figure was the highest in a decade and the 1971 figure the lowest in the same period. A large proportion of the decline reflected the fact that Monsanto no longer sells the chemical for uses in which it might escape into the environment.

PCB, the chemical nickname for polychlorinated biphenyl, is a chemical cousin of the hard pesticides. It has a wide variety of industrial uses: as a heat transference material, as an insulating fluid in electrical equipment, as a plasticizer, an additive in inks and in hydraulic and lubricating systems.

Because of its widespread use and its resistence to decay, it is almost everywhere in the environment. It has been found in substantial concentrations in the body tissue of fish in the Great Lakes and predatory birds.

PCB that has leaked out of heating systems has contaminated human food.

Because of furor about its widespread use, Monsanto announced last year that it would stop sales of the chemical for any but closed systems. However, actual shipments did not cease until early this year.

The company chose to make the figures public "because scientists have continued to express a need for the data to make a proper estimate of how much PCB might be in the environment," a spokesman said.

"It would be a completely false and irresponsible conclusion to say all PCB produced is in the environment," he continued. "Over 60 per cent of all sales in the past 12 years have been for closed-system electrical uses."